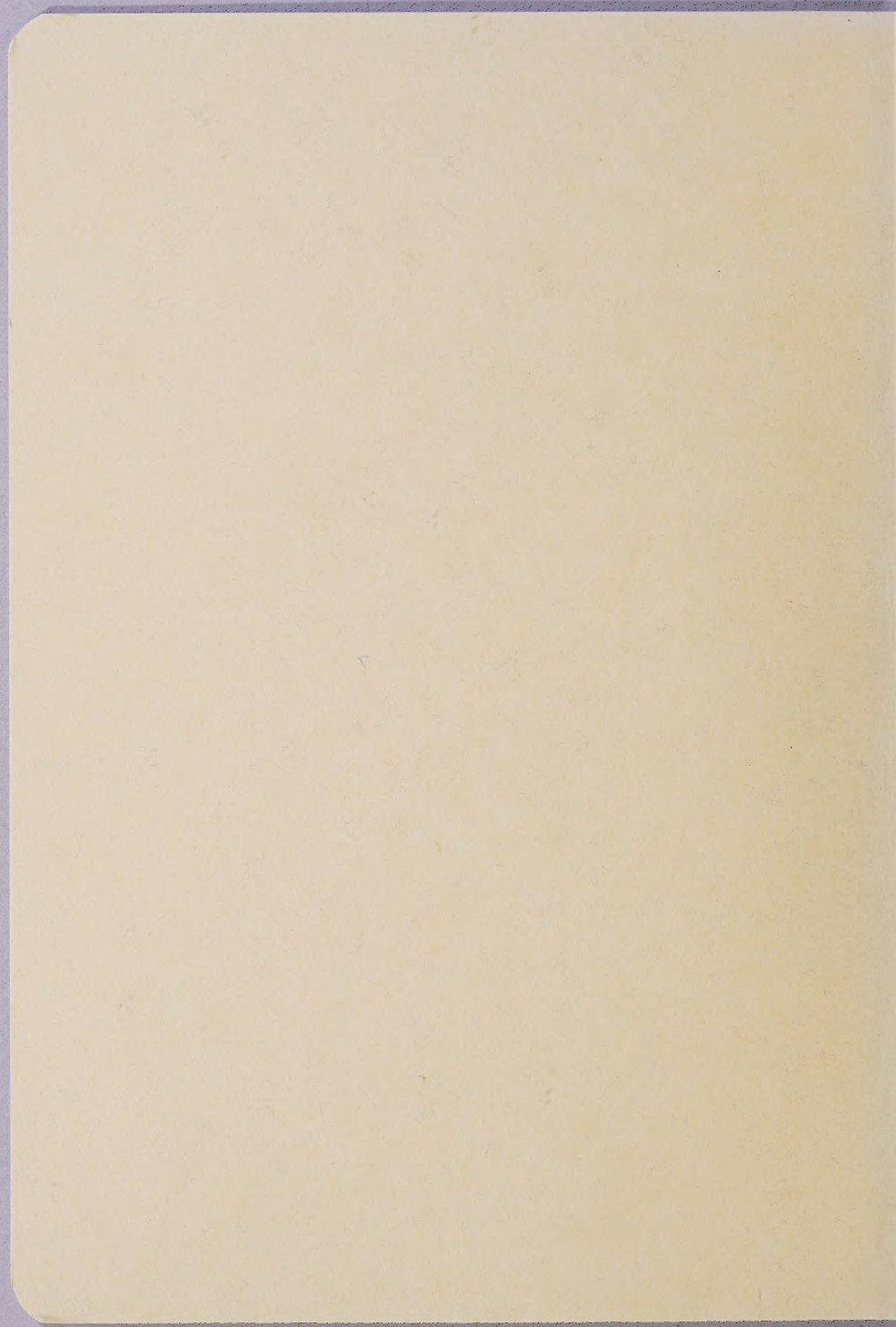


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ANTICIPATING PLURALISM



The Founders' Vision

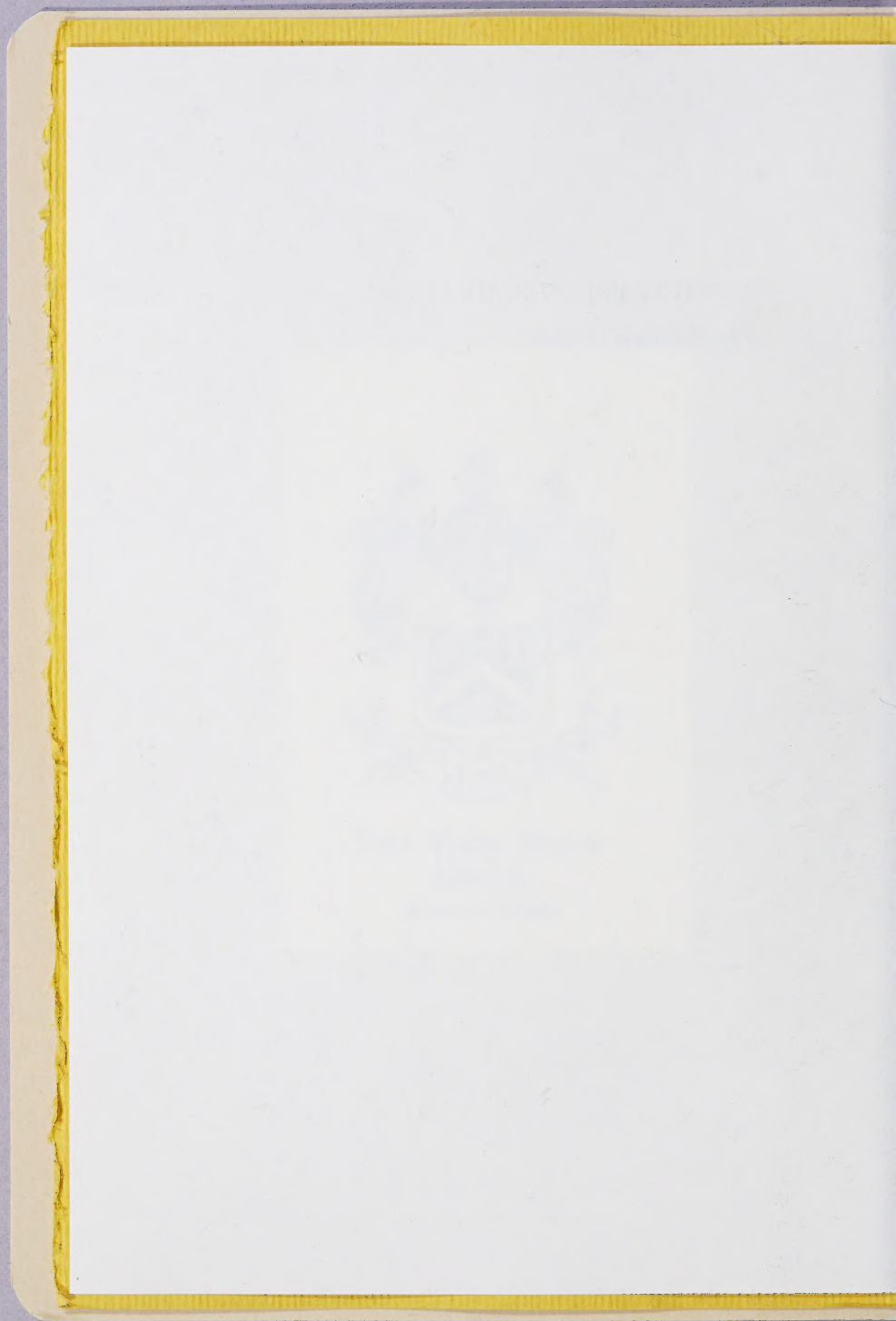
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by MARTIN E. MARTY

THE ASSOCIATES OF
THE JOHN CARTER BROWN LIBRARY

PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

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This address by Martin E. Marty, Fairfax M. Cone Distinguished Service Professor of the History of Modern Christianity at the University of Chicago, was delivered to the Associates of the John Carter Brown Library on the occasion of their forty-third Annual Meeting on May 2, 1986.

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⌘ RHODE ISLAND in its 350th year provides an appropriate locale for thought about American religious pluralism. One of the documents mounted for an exhibition at the John Carter Brown Library on the occasion of this anniversary shows how nettling religious diversity could be to other colonists who wanted religious uniformity. Cotton Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana* (London, 1702) is appropriately opened to a page in which the New England cleric complained that Rhode Island was home to "Antinomians, Familists, Anabaptists, Anti-Sabbatarians, Arminians, Socinians, Quakers, Ranters, every thing in the World but Roman Catholicks, and Real Christians." Mather referred to Rhode Island citizens as "this general Muster of Opinionists," and so, some might say, they have remained.

Today much of the rest of America has caught up with Rhode Island, so far as diversity of opinions is concerned. The Providence Yellow Pages lists twenty-nine religious groups; one can find more than that in many putatively homogeneous Bible Belt cities. Rhode Island owns the distinction, however, of having helped other colonies and states learn how to provide a polity and way of life to accommodate the diversity. It is this that usually goes by the name of "pluralism."

Pluralism can be the name for a philosophy (like that of America's William James) which sees the universe not finally as having a single source or center—as monotheism contends it does—but as being metaphysically "plural." That kind of pluralism is not at issue here. Pluralism can also refer to a point of view that relativizes everything; there are, in that view, "many truths out there, all equally

true and thus equally false." Such an outlook is not at issue here, although it can be a corollary, in some peoples' minds, of religious diversity. Pluralism may refer, too, to that diversity itself: it is the name for the general musters of opinionists that crowd and clot our Yellow Pages all over the nation.

Pluralism as we are using the term here builds on that diversity, but in addition, as noted, refers to a polity, a program, a way of life. Pluralism in this sense is a value that helps assure civil concord when a republic is made up of individuals and groups who do not share each others' outlooks on life or on what Paul Tillich called matters of "ultimate concern."

This pluralism is at issue today. Around the world one notes its absence, or despair over it, or at least weariness with it. In some places like Lebanon the separate clusters and sects express their relations with guns, as Christians, Shi'ite Muslims, Jews, Sunni Muslims, Druse, and modern political ideologues in their own sects turn tribalist and kill each other. In Malaysia as elsewhere—is Nigeria next?—Muslim minorities repeal republican constitutions and establish Islam as the privileged faith. Iran after its Revolution has done this under the Ayatullah Khomeini. The result is a theocracy or a clerocracy which persecutes non-Shi'ites. Northern Ireland is an example of inter-Christian—Protestant and Catholic—warfare against even (or especially) a bi-ethnic, bi-religious, and thus "pluralist," polity.

Weariness with pluralism in the United States receives frequent if more moderate expression in the 1980s. Three

hundred and fifty years after Rhode Island helped set the pattern for pluralism, its outcome today leads many to question the possibility of developing "civic virtue" and private morality when so many faiths and philosophical views receive a hearing. Genially secular America is nervous about assertive Fundamentalists, while Fundamentalists claim that one group, small though it be, the so-called "secular humanists," have gained or preempted privilege when it comes to determining American values. Some charge Roman Catholic bishops with "violating separation of church and state" when they speak out in pastoral letters. Others believe the courts have gone too far in assuring "freedom of conscience" to intense religious groups code-named "cults." When Pawtucket, Rhode Island, is allowed by the courts to present religious symbols on public grounds in a holiday season *only* if these are surrounded by secular symbols, some see pluralism gone wild. Why cannot majorities in religion have monopolies or places of privilege proportionate to their numbers? Why cannot everyone else sit quietly by?

This weariness with pluralism in America has fortunately not made of it a "Lebanon without Guns," which is what follows when a polity and patience break down. The Cotton Mathers among us may be complaining, and homogeneity-minded people may try to repeal pluralism, but the example of Rhode Island is too old and the diversity that was displayed there in 1702 and perhaps as early as 1636 is too rich and assured to be done away with. A third strategy for overcoming pluralism, attempting to make converts of everyone and thus to have a homogeneous culture, goes on,

but without much hope of success. Let it be noted that such proselytizing is perfectly legal and was assured in Rhode Island and assured again when the thirteen states came together in the new nation two hundred years ago. A fourth strategy, however, is less voluntarist, more implicitly coercive. It would overcome pluralism and its confusions by finding at least mild ways to give privilege to one tradition. Two traditions, each of them overrefined and overdefined by their advocates, have been candidates for this privilege in recent decades.

The first derives from the Enlightenment heritage of founders named Adams, Washington, Jefferson, Franklin, Madison and the like. They were Protestant church members, but the outlook of most of these eighteenth-century national founders centered less in biblical revelation or faith in God the Father of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob or as the Father of Jesus Christ than in a general revelation or faith in Nature's God, Natural Law, and Natural Rights—accessible to all people of reason and conscience.

No philosophy department today, to my knowledge, teaches their original religious position as the truth about life. We teach the outlook of these national founders in history departments instead. Yet the forms, ethos, and intentions it generated live in our civil and educational life and can be invested with new philosophies. The last coherent attempt to give this outlook special privilege came in the public school philosophy of John Dewey and his colleagues and heirs. In his *A Common Faith* in 1934 Dewey despaired of any hope for churches to be more than centers for ritual

and private solace. Divided as they were, they could not overcome pluralism enough to help provide a common social philosophy or "faith." He drew on a democratic philosophy which, he thought, deserved what we might call quasi-metaphysical sanction, ceremonial reinforcement, and institutional embodiment (as in the schools). The last line of his book asked that this common faith now become "explicit" and "militant."

The Dewey version of a common civil faith never got very far in any explicit and militant faith. Attempts by religious conservatives to portray it as a coherent and organized religion called "secular humanism" often betray more explicitness and militancy of their own than they signal careful analysis. Instead, that secular party, by no means defeated and perhaps not diminished, is in simple disarray, while religious forces are in battle array and better organized. The schools and other institutions settle for "values clarification" and other accommodations to pluralism, none of which satisfy their opponents, whose half of the inning we are observing in 1986.

The other tradition is usually called "the Judaeo-Christian." Those who are weary with the general muster of opinionists that make up today's America would homogenize them into a single tradition. Many Jews smell in these homogenizing efforts a "quest for a Christian America." Some reflective evangelically Protestant historians—one thinks of leaders like Mark Noll, Nathan Hatch, and George Marsden—have had to go on record criticizing what they called *The Search for a Christian America* as based

on a perversion of our pluralist record, a traducing of the traditions that began in 1636 in Rhode Island or in Philadelphia in the 1780s.

One need not reach to the Protestant militants for expressions of impatience with pluralism. The President of the United States, the Attorney-General, and the Secretary of Education are among those who regularly go on record as asking for a privileging of this "Judaean-Christian" tradition. It is often discerned as the ghost behind efforts to amend the Constitution to allow for what should sound like general prayer. Its enemies claim to know, however, that this would turn the schools into places of specific prayer—all prayer is specific—and provide a platform for aggressive groups that would promote their "Christian America" on legal grounds. Many of our most distinguished philosophers, among them Alasdair MacIntyre in *After Virtue* (1981), or our most public publicists, among them columnist James Kilpatrick, give voice to criticisms of pluralism. The MacIntyres fear that no virtue can be forthcoming in a republic made up of a general muster of opinionists. The Kilpatricks in their turn speak for the less eloquent who criticize the Supreme Court for its scrupulosity in banning specific religious symbols from privileged place.

From the current controversies one theme in particular may be retrieved for this lecture, a regularly voiced one. It goes something like this: "If only the Founders had foreseen our wild pluralism, they would have taken more care to say what they meant in the First Amendment on religious freedom. They would have made clear that they were not chartering such wild pluralism. They were religious

people who believed that religion was somehow vital to civic and republican virtue." This claim is demonstrably true. The argument goes on that they would have assured some sort of common faith or tradition through legal patterns, had they foreknown what we would make of our pluralist charters after 350 or 200 years. This kind of talk inspires inquiry into what the national founders thought or, as the Attorney-General keeps saying, what they "intended."

The intentions of these national founders have become an item for inquiry today. All parties tend to use their conception of these intentions as a base for establishing their own political positions. It is not likely that many would follow these intentions all the way, in would-be literal historic senses. For example, it is clear that one of the intentions of the southern colonists was to assure that a white, male, slave-holding republic should prevail.

There are other problems, as most literary critics today point out. Not only have contexts and circumstances shifted, but faith in the ability to know intentions is itself questioned. In respect to many historic documents, one has difficulty with "intentions" simply because the authorship of those documents is not known. Or the multivocality of symbols and signs in documents represents a problem for those who would make one thing of them. Or, further, does even an author know her or his full "intentions?" Authors and recipients of love letters often find themselves wondering, "How could I have intended to say this or that?" or "How could you have taken this or that as my intention?" Having embarked on the search for intentions with fingers crossed, as it were, we propose that it is valid to learn what one can

of the contexts and circumstances of our past and the expressions of those who left a legacy.

From what has gone before it is clear that I think of American religious and moral outlooks as issuing chiefly from two parallel, often congenial, sometimes conflicting, and occasionally contradictory traditions. The Judaeo-Christian I prefer to speak of as "biblical," since its proponents made their case on the basis of the Hebrew scriptures and, to some extent, the New Testament. These scriptures and expositions of them had and have awesome significance for anyone who would understand, address, or reform America. The first set of American founders, the early colonists, whether they established a Protestant church, as they did in nine of the thirteen colonies, or whether they did not, as in the case of Rhode Island and other maverick kin colonies, lived chiefly off the biblical charters, as they read them. Most of the weariness with pluralism today comes from those who would give special privilege to the biblical tradition as they see it.

The other source was the Enlightenment or "republican" or "Natural" tradition of the second set of founders. It was they who fought over disestablishment of the churches in the 1780s and after. Some of these republicans contended for a continuing establishment. The Adamses of New England, the Washingtons and the Henrys of Virginia, and any number of others could not conceive of the problems that legal establishment of one church or tax support for all churches ("multiple establishment") could create. Washington was ready to assure that congregations of Jews, Mohammedans, or "otherwise" should get public fund

support for their faiths. The Jeffersons and Madisons, on the other hand, and the dissenting "sects" in the tradition of Rhode Island's early colonial founders, who had now made it down to Virginia, reasoned otherwise.

Some opposed state support of any religion, including their own, as being a perversion of that religion. This was the case made by Roger Williams, John Clarke, and other Rhode Island founders. Others opposed a state connection to religion because it made hypocrites, knaves, and fools of exploitative civil leaders, or ruled good people out of first-class citizenship because they held the wrong opinions in religion—even though, as Madison argued, religion by nature could not be coerced. The Rhode Island dissenting tradition and the eighteenth-century Virginia Enlightenment tradition came together in the end and won.

The polity of Rhode Island in 1636 and the Constitution and its First Amendment in 1787-91 represented a break with 1400 years of establishment practice. In human societies almost always and everywhere, even when they allowed for a plurality of sects and a diversity of opinions—and such allowances were rare—majority groups or powerful rulers either imposed one faith or else gave it favor by law. The belief that each regime should promote or insist upon one faith was a corollary of the generally accepted truth that a faith would be diminished if it were to be seen merely within a general mustering of opinionists. Thus in a classic sentence in 1927 the refined British apologist Father Ronald Knox said that "the Catholic Church will not be one amongst the philosophies." Even Father John Courtney Murray in 1960 could say that "religious pluralism is against the will

of God," and could call it "lamentable." I say "even" because Murray went on to say that such pluralism is, however, "the human condition; it is written into the script of history." And, he continued, "it will not somehow marvelously cease to trouble the City." He urged Catholics and other Americans to deal with it, and he more than anyone else helped bring about a change in Catholicism. In 1965 the Second Vatican Council officially recognized pluralism in its Declaration on Religious Liberty; Murray was the prime drafter and promoter of the notion. That "even" he could see religious pluralism chiefly as a problem for faith and civility signals how deep is the discontent with general musterings of opinionists. "They" by their existence call into question what "I" hold to be the only truth. They tempt me first to intolerance and second to self-questioning and finally to concern over values in a republic that assures equal status to any and all religious opinions and groups.

Against this background, the work of colonial founders in Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, and elsewhere in the biblical tradition, or in Virginia and elsewhere in the Enlightenment tradition, turns out to be even more heroic, their outcomes epochal, even if taken for granted today.

The fact that these sets of founders "won" does not mean that the issues were gone, the battles over, the uncertainties past. John Courtney Murray was as free to promote Catholicism as the only truth after Vatican II as he was before. Many of the Baptists who supported the Jeffersonians—one thinks of the maverick Elder John Leland for example—could spend their lives evangelizing in the hope that their own faith would prevail and thus that

America would overcome pluralism. The Enlightenment founders similarly advocated their distinctive or special religious views as if they were general.

The winners in the century and a half after 1787 were the evangelical Protestants, particularly those whites who held general cultural domain, one that they shared with the political leaders and literati of the Enlightenment-humanist outlook. The evangelicals evangelized successfully. They increased in numbers. They knew how to work numbers, organization, and loyalties to civil advantage. The result was what I once called in a book title a *Righteous Empire*, one filled with voluntary associations that consolidated the Biblical-Protestant tradition. It is finally this that President Reagan and others evoke when they appeal to nostalgia by describing a world dominated by the little white church and the little red schoolhouse in American communities. Of course, the concept has come to be enlarged now to include Catholics and, in some cases, the Jews of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. Many agreed with the evangelical who said a republic was built on "sameness," in peoplehood, language, and religion. Few would overdefine that tradition, because sectarian disputes were constant within that *Righteous Empire*, and they come to the fore again whenever advocates of the Judaeo-Christian tradition have to spell out *which* values in it would give us civil peace. Yet the general claim, ethos, and outlook were reinforced for many decades.

After World War II came the era of what I call "reflective pluralism." Father Murray joined forces with the Protestant thinker Reinhold Niebuhr and the Jewish

sociologist-theologian Will Herberg to articulate the terms of life in what Herberg in 1955 called *Protestant-Catholic-Jew America*, a three-faith mustering of support for a religious "American Way of Life." These three and their cohorts also worked to assure freedom for nonbelievers, "secularists." There was popular support for such pluralism on the part of citizens who came to know each other urgently and civilly in the Armed Forces in the 1940s and the suburbs of the 1950s.

American Way of Life religion, however, was torn apart in the political controversies of the 1960s. Both sides appealed to it in opposing views on Civil Rights, the New Frontier, the Great Society, the Nixonian program, the Vietnamese War. "Hippies" in the counter-culture, joined by non-Judaeo-Christian "cultists," tore at the fabric of Way of Life religion. Feminists, homosexuals, blacks, Hispanics, the new Asians—all these made their cases, sometimes on the basis of the two traditions and sometimes in opposition to them. Change came in the roles of women, in understanding of sexuality, in forms of family life. The courts in their "school prayer" and other church-state decisions kept assuring the pluralism that the homogenizers thought threatened civic and public virtue. A general conservative movement, as it was called, urged citizens to go back to the simpler days of the eighteenth-century national founders. Populist movements and Fundamentalisms made their way. I have just summarized the plot of the last two decades.

It appears to be ironic that the fervent attempts at homogenizing, and at favoring a particular tradition, come at a time when American pluralism is again showing diver-

sity in fresh ways. The Hispanic Catholics come with very different outlooks than do so many of the now-assimilated direct-from-Europe Catholic groups. Zionists and other self-assertive Jews are less ready to blend in than were some of their foreparents as recently as before the 1967 war in Israel. Native American and black leaders, to say nothing of feminists, criticize the white male dominance in the old traditions. Radical evangelicals wonder whether the Judaeo-Christian tradition should be privileged if it is to keep its prophetic power. Mainstream Protestants are often most critical of the privileging attempts for a tradition they once monopolized. (*The Christian Century*, journalistic voice of liberal Protestantism, a magazine for which I am a Senior Editor, in 1951 had a cover editorial on "Pluralism, a National Menace," a title no editor and not many readers would now support. Mainstream Protestantism is often criticized for being *too* hospitable to pluralism today. It is railed against for its failure of nerve, its unwillingness to provide a foundation for society or a foil for other pluralists.) The boat people and New Religion supporters widen pluralism from the East, from Asia. And more.

Did the founders of either the seventeenth century or the eighteenth century anticipate such a time and circumstance? If so, how did their anticipations lead them to act? Those are the questions after 350 years in one case, after 200 years in the other. We shall address some of them briefly.

It goes almost without saying that the majority of religiously-minded colonists of the seventeenth century anticipated pluralism chiefly by taking pains to ward it off. They had come from Europe in order to secure religious

liberty for themselves, not for others, and took pains to distance themselves from others and to keep them at a distance. This was the case at Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay, in Connecticut and New Haven. In the southern colonies the Church of England colonists went about a similar business of trying to exclude those not of that Church, though they were less efficient at doing so. Most colonies started with an official tax-supported Church, and mistrust of dissenters, sectarians, passersby, and innovators was almost universal. Quakers and Roman Catholics drew most fire, but there was plenty of fire left over for others who did not fit the pattern. This story of anticipating pluralism is too familiar to bear repeating here. The present point is to see in these early communities a precedent for living in pluralist colonies which was followed by the creation of a nation that allowed for freedom of conscience and religious diversity on equal terms.

That Rhode Island was pre-eminent in New England and a pioneer among all the colonies is a point easy to establish. The presence of Roger Williams, Anne Hutchinson, and John Clarke in the early years demonstrated the diversity, the need for a pluralist polity, and the presence of one. The old charter of 1663 spoke of a "livelie experiment" with religious liberty, just as Baptist pioneer John Clarke had spoken in 1658 of such a lively experiment. An experiment it had to be, for there were few if any precedents and no one knew whether it would work. Lively it was assured to be, given the general muster of opinionists who found their way to the colony.

The various founders allowed for pluralism on varying

grounds. John Clarke, it becomes clear, did so in part to assure free access by all to all, but with an inner assurance that in such a free climate the Baptists would win and the Rhode Islanders would follow his way. Anne Hutchinson was not a systematic thinker about polity, but she needed a place where after her banishment from Massachusetts Bay she could follow her own conscience. Roger Williams has often been remade into a latter-day democrat and civil libertarian. In such a guise he loses some of his power and is wrenched from context. On some grounds he is so different from most people who appeal to him that it hardly seems valid to bring up his name. As a seeker, he was a Christian millennialist who believed that no church and no state were sufficiently pure to exist with divine sanctioning or claims. For that reason none of the churches should be established, since all in their present form and epoch were impure. And for a similar reason no state could do the establishing, since all were too impure to charter anything having to do with God. Yet as irretrievable as Williams's reading of history might be, his example and its practical effects remain as Exhibit A in a gallery of "anticipations of pluralism." He certainly helped provide for the pluralist polity and thrived as a citizen and a seeking believer within it. So did countless Rhode Islanders who followed him.

Professor William G. McLoughlin, Jr., of Brown University is the expert on New England dissent in general, and it is hard to picture someone from the Middle West like myself bringing Middle Western coals to the Rhode Island Newcastle where McLoughlin has published his two giant volumes on New England dissent. One can almost

simply point to it and let that suffice as a bulky testimony that opponents of dissent anticipated pluralism by suppressing it and that dissent anticipated pluralism by hanging in there and eventually winning out. McLoughlin shows that Isaac Backus was typical of New England Baptists in seeing some limits to pluralism. Backus also would have converted the colonies to the Baptist faith, and he did think that some sort of Protestant outlook was necessary in a world threatened by Catholics and others. The often-cited John Leland, an evangelizer and a Jeffersonian, was both too eccentric to be seen as typical and too erratic to serve as a model. Yet he thrived, and showed that a larger pluralism was being anticipated. In 1791, for instance, he did some envisioning: "Let a man be Pagan, Turk, Jew or Christian, he is eligible to any post" in the new government, and "the notion of a Christian commonwealth should be exploded forever."

When all things about the complex New England colonies are said and done, it must be observed that in Rhode Island more than anywhere else the leadership recognized the values of diversity and in their polity anticipated modern pluralism. The Baptists in Massachusetts and Connecticut, over a hundred years after the Rhode Island founders did their founding, were less ready to follow through the consequences of their own way of life as they stretched the borders of establishment, privilege, and "sameness." In Enlightenment times John Adams was still pleading for some genial sort of establishment (against Backus and moderate Baptists) and Samuel Adams hoped for a new republic that would be a "reign of political Protestantism."

What McLoughlin calls a "Protestant Counter-Reforma-

tion" was well in place during the Second Great Awakening at the end of the eighteenth century. Timothy Dwight, President of Yale, helped lead the charge against infidels. McLoughlin reproduces just a sample of the prevailing diatribe against diversity in pluralism, one that gives a flavor of the times and shows how New England then appeared to the homogenizers. One of them, who signed himself "Senex, M.A." in the *American Mercury* in 1791 went on at Providence Yellow Pages length. He feared that the present Congress would "pass a declarative resolve granting universal toleration to all opinions and free liberty to Familists, Libertines, Erastians, Anti-trinitarians, Anabaptists, Antinomians, Arians, Sabellians, Montanists, Arminians, Socinians, Deists, Mortallians, Gnosticks, Fatalists, Atheists, Universalists, Romanists, Sandemonists, Seekers, Shakers, &c., &c. In a word, room for Hell above ground. What can be expected but that such Gehenical errors will turn Christ's Academy into the Devil's University." Yet Senex, M.A., was not to have his way and in that very year Congress was passing such a "declarative resolution" in the form of the First Amendment. Its full implications were not to be realized until the 1940s, when the Supreme Court began applying First Amendment measures to the various states. But that is a different story for a different day.

Anticipations varied from place to place in the Middle Colonies. Most often cited was William Penn, the Quaker founder of Pennsylvania, who belongs with the Rhode Islanders as an anticipator of pluralism and whose colony certainly recognized and housed diversity. There are those who read Penn as we have read Clarke: he was ready to

assure such liberties because he joined early Quakers in having so much faith in the spread of the Spirit (when untrammelled) that he could dream that the whole world would soon turn Quaker, thus solving the problem of pluralism. Rather than point to the familiar instance of Pennsylvania's anticipations, I will turn to a more surprising colonial source, New Netherland.

I choose this instance because anticipations of pluralism there resulted from what today we would call the intentions of capitalist free enterprisers, from whose camp today come some articulations of a homogenizing, privileged "Judaean-Christian tradition." Yet the merchant has always represented a problem to the privilegers. Commerce depends on trade, and trade does not follow faith lines. (Boston merchants sometimes moved to Newport, or fudged, or turned subversive, or eventually turned Boston Yankee, departing from Puritanism.) New Netherland was born as a trade settlement, not as a covenanted colony. Of course, it had a privileged and even established religion in the form of the Dutch Reformed church, small as it was in the mid-seventeenth century. New Netherland tried to hold to privilege, but the merchants anticipated pluralism and worked to assure it.

Thus in 1654 some Sephardic Jews, Iberians until 1492 and residents of Recife, Brazil, most recently, sailed into the harbor. What should the "-Christian tradition" monopolists do about these representatives of the Judaean-side of that hyphenation? They did not belong. Johannes Megapolensis spoke for the established Reformed clergy in that moment: "As we have here Papists, Mennonites and Lutherans among the Dutch; also many Puritans or Independents, and

many Atheists and various other servants of Baal among the English under Government, who conceal themselves under the name of Christians; it would create a still greater confusion, if the obstinate and immovable Jews came to settle here." Settle there they did, at the behest of the Dutch West India Company in old Amsterdam, where Jews held some power. Settle there they must, if New Amsterdam was to succeed.

Settle there many did, even if what one commercialist called the *plompe onbesneden idioten* ("clumsy uncircumcised idiots") in the clergy resisted the change. Charles X of Sweden knew what motivated love for pluralism among such. He tired of a Dutch diplomat's defense of religious freedom based on commercial needs. Pulling out a coin, he said, "There is your religion! You worship only your idol, which is commerce." The Dutch did not disestablish their church, but they were urged to follow a policy called *conniventie* or *oockgluiking*, "connivance" or "blinking." They were to "shut their eyes" to dissent and diversity since they could not tolerate it but they needed it. Governor Peter Stuyvesant, by conniving and blinking, was to "sweetly let it pass." Diversity did not pass away. Commerce and pluralism won by this form of anticipating.

The high drama occurred in Virginia, where dissent in the form of Baptist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, and other small but growing groups chipped away at an establishment already weakened by its clergy's Loyalism in any case. Most of the Virginia founders were members of that relaxed Church of England, but they brought in new universalizing ideas and worked for a wide anticipation of modern pluralism.

Franklin worked for change as early as in the Pennsylvania Constitutional issues of 1776. Lutheran Henry Melchior Muhlenberg complained: "It now seems as if a Christian people were [to be] ruled by Jews, Turks, Spinozists, Deists, [and] perverted materialists."

Washington's anticipation of pluralism was a multiple establishment that would have allowed for "Jews, Mahomitans or otherwise" religious people to gain support through tax money. He and Patrick Henry lost out in 1786 to Madison, who helped secure passage of Jefferson's "Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom." Jefferson made it clear that he "meant to comprehend, within the mantle of [legal] protection, the Jew and Gentile, the Christian and Mahometan, the Hindoo, and infidel of every denomination." Luther Martin called this "downright infidelity or paganism" when Massachusetts was busy ratifying the Constitution. He would have nothing to do with Jefferson's assurance that for his neighbor "to say that there are 20 gods, or no god" had nothing to do with creating civil disabilities. Jefferson, while he advocated a religion of Nature and Reason (that looked strangely Unitarian and thus sectarian to his foes), clearly anticipated the pluralism of a later time.

So did James Madison, who fused the biblical and Enlightenment traditions most creatively. Madison anticipated pluralism by working for a large as opposed to a small republic. He counted on pluralism, not homogeneity, to help assure liberties. Any glance at *Federalist* papers 10 and 51, the two most familiar on this score, will show how much he banked on "the multiplicity of sects" to promote "the degree of security" needed. In fact, "the number of interests

and sects" should be large. Whoever opposed the power of one or another could counter-organize and in its "jealousy" help assure freedom to all.

The temptation to enlarge upon Madison is strong, but it would be out of place in a celebration of Rhode Island. How do the biblical and Enlightenment traditions meet? I have often seen them interacting the way George Santayana saw them contributing to liberty. "English Liberty in America" was an essay in his (1920) *Character and Opinion in the United States*. There he argued that our liberties came in part from people he called "pensive or rabid apostles of liberty," which "meant liberty for themselves to be just so," no matter how much anyone "for the sake of harmony" wanted them "to be a little different." Anne Hutchinson, John Clarke, Roger Williams, and later, Isaac Backus and John Leland would belong in this camp along with the other Baptists, Quakers, and "sectarians" of New England.

At the same time, Santayana argued, one needed the compromising spirit, the synthetic grasp, of the Anglo-Saxon legal tradition and even, said Santayana, its "soul." He saw "a certain vagueness of soul, together with a great gregariousness and tendency to be moulded by example and by prevalent opinion" as a "requisite for feeling free under English liberty." There had to be a "massive malleable character," a "vigorous moral youth, that renders co-operation possible and progressive." That was the spirit of Enlightenment Virginia, where vagueness of soul and cooperative spirit were born of commitment, not apathy; of philosophy, not surrender.

Two centuries, even three and a half centuries, later, where does this leave us? The historian is normally restrained to be confined in the story, but I have been invited to see implications for today, and will point to some.

It would seem advisable to reread the stories, to study the anticipations and even intentions of the founders, in order to learn of the great complexity which the homogenizers gloss over today. The thirteen colonies represented vast differences, embodied great diversities, and presented awesome problems to those who would suppress pluralism. Second, one might counsel against romanticizing the homogenized past of the little white church and the little red school house. Agreeing on a "Judaico-Christian tradition" would settle little. The most agreed upon tradition about the full authority of the Bible, God, Jesus, Spirit, heaven, hell, law, grace, and Protestant superiority with an evangelical ethos, prevailed in America's *Righteous Empire* around, say, 1861, when partisans of that common compact came to engage in the bloodiest imaginable civil war. Bronislaw Malinowski observed what becomes a caution: Aggression, like charity, begins at home.

Such a vision would urge that, against all the totalitarian and tribalist trends, America not weary of or give up on pluralism. If one must choose between a society where those who are unified grant rights to dissent, or one where those who are diverse must find coherence, the American record suggests value in the latter. Yet a quest for coherences is important. Citizens are free to use the voluntary sector to argue for their particular views of life, including their notions of what American civil society ought to be like.

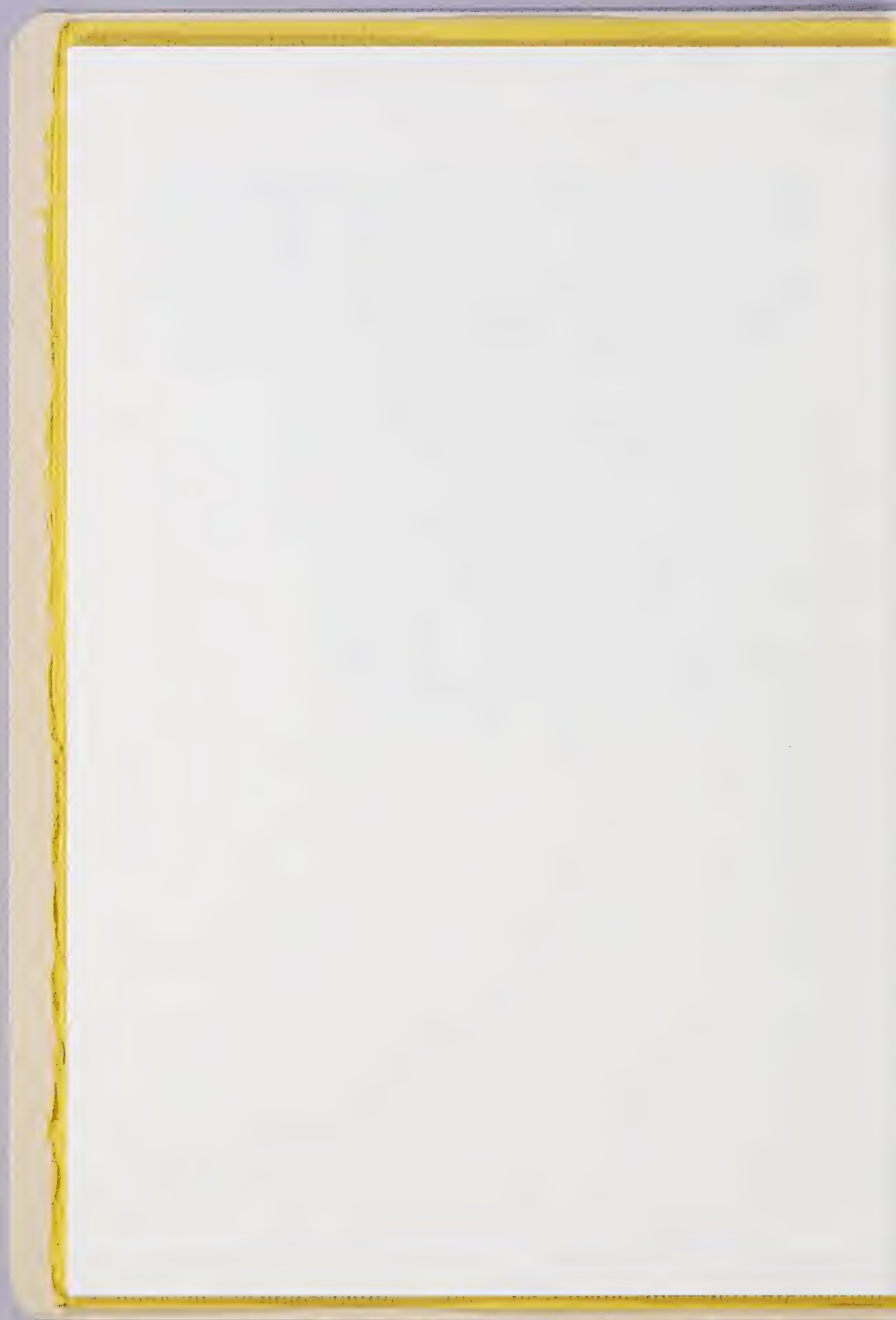
Religion, Madison made clear, dare not be established; a particular religion dare not be privileged; yet religion may not be used to create a legal disability for individuals or groups who would contend on its basis. At the same time, the temptation to grant new privilege to, say, the Judaeo-Christian tradition would be a denial of the polity and an unwise and unfair imposition today.

Coherence can come as Americans revisit their common investment in American space and time, the landscape they love and the generation they care for. They have a common memory, narrative, myth, story—one that begins in Europe and Africa, includes Spanish and French settlement, Native American survival, and black freedom, alongside the traditions of Rhode Island or New Netherland or Virginia. They know common suffering, setbacks, problems. They have common victories. They share what Thomas Jefferson called unsentimentally, "affection." They confront what John Courtney Murray called "the American proposition." This means that "we hold these truths to be self-evident. . . ." They share elements of philosophies, and their religious outlooks often overlap.

So the same founders who wished their own outlook could prevail had increasingly to deal with diversity and to create the pluralist polity. I used to say to Father Murray that since pluralism was here, we should enjoy it. I would move only his adverb: he said it would not somehow "marvelously cease to trouble" the republic, the "City"; I would prefer to say it will not somehow "cease marvelously to trouble" the republic. Living with pluralism was not easy for Stuyvesant or Senex, M.A., or, I suppose Williams

or Jefferson, and it is not now. But after a historical review one must say, "consider the alternatives." The attainment of the benefits of pluralism is difficult, but here a word of Spinoza applies well to our late and lively experiment, our fragile and by no means secure pluralist resolution: "But all things that are excellent are as difficult as they are rare."

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